R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 003 909 48

SELECTION AND PRESENTATION OF READY EQUIVALENTS IN A TRANSLATION DICTIONARY, WORK PAPER FOR CONFERENCE ON LEXICOGRAPHY, INDIANA UNIVERSITY, NOVEMBER 11-12, 1960.

BY- MARTIN, SAMUEL E.
INDIANA UNIV., BLOOMINGTON

REPORT NUMBER NDEA-VI-16-6 PUB DATE 60
EDRS PRICE MF-$0.09 HC-$0.44 11P.

DESCRIPTORS- *DICTIONARIES, *TRANSLATION, *LEXICOGRAPHY, *BILINGUALISM, *SYNTAX, JAPANESE, KOREAN CULTURE, CONFERENCES, BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA

PROBLEMS WHICH ARISE IN CREATING BILINGUAL TRANSLATION DICTIONARIES WERE DISCUSSED. SOME OF THE MORE SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS IN BUILDING SUCH DICTIONARIES WERE OUTLINED AS (1) KNOWLEDGE OF THE POTENTIAL USER-GROUP, (2) AWARENESS OF SYNTACTICAL LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES, AND (3) ABILITY TO SKEW WHEN TRANSLATING FROM ONE LANGUAGE TO ANOTHER. EXAMPLES IN ENGLISH-JAPANESE AND ENGLISH-KOREAN DICTIONARIES WERE USED FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES. THIS REPORT IS ONE OF A SERIES OF 13 PAPERS PRESENTED AT A CONFERENCE ON LEXICOGRAPHY, INDIANA UNIVERSITY, NOVEMBER 11-12, 1960. (JH)

ED003909

16-6

Workpaper for Conference on Lexicography, Ind. Univ., Nov. 11-12 1960.

SELECTION AND PRESENTATION OF READY EQUIVALENTS IN A TRANSLATION DICTIONARY

Samuel E. Martin, Yale University

Making a bilingual dictionary involves frustration and compromise. You set out with the cheerful view that you can produce a work that will be all things to all men--and perhaps to all machines; you end up with a feeling that you are failing one and all. You want to make a dictionary that will be concise but exhaustive; exact while not exacting; linguistically adequate for BOTH languages, yet uncluttered with trivial details. Sooner or later you have to concentrate on certain goals and forget others. Each dictionary represents some unique compromise, useful--we hope--for some purposes and grustrating for others.

Dictionaries are usually made by scholars and many, as a result, are made FOR scholars. Perhaps we can define a scholar as a man of insatiable curiosity for whom, wisely or unwisely, time is infinitely expendable. A student, on the other hand, can be defined as a person who enjoys a curiosity that is specific and limited, and who must husband his time well if he is to survive. A machine can then be defined as a very fast but dumb student, with a literal mind and a nagging insistence on explicit directions and forced choices.

We are now in a period that requires bilingual dictionaries both for the student and for the computer. I think of each sort of dictionary as a "direct-access translation dictionary", a kind of machine that has built into it much of the information that a scholar's dictionary might take for granted. For translation by a computer it is desirable that ALL grammatical information somehow be incorporated into the dictionary entry, so that the dictionary itself--with proper programming--can function as a kind of sentence generator. In a sense, the beginning student needs something very similar: a machine that will do the work for him automatically; a dictionary that will produce an

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE
Office of Education
This document has been reproduced exactly as received from the person or organization originating it. Points of view or opinions stated do not necessarily represent official Office of Education position or policy.

adequate, if uninspired, translation with a minimum of human cogitation and with little or nothing in the way of other reference works.

Now it is too much to expect such a dictionary to work both ways at once. A dictionary that turns out intelligible English (or near-English) sentences for an American who looks up the words in a Japanese sentence will be put together in a different way from one that does the opposite. We must make an early decision: WHO will use the dictionary? If it is a Japanese, he will want much more information included in the English representations (information on the pronunciation, the syntactic class, the inflection, etc.) than he will need on the Japanese side; if he is an American, he will want more than just the graphic representation of the Japanese. The native speaker of a language is in a position to supply much information that must be made explicit for either the foreigner or the computer.

Despite bulk and good intentions, existing dictionaries lack sufficient information, apparently, to keep a Professor of English in Seoul University from writing "these two vocabularies" when he means "these two vocabulary items" (or, actually, "the two words"), and to discourage him from saying 'I have to mail one letter" when he means "I have a letter to mail". They do not keep a Yale professor/of Japanese from translating "they sell cars" as zidoosya o urimasu when the Japanese say ... utte imasu, nor warn the student that while hasitte imasu is quivalent to "is running", itte imasu is NOT equivalent to "is going" but rather to "is gone". Neither our dictionaries nor our grammars prepare the American student for his surprise in finding that the Japanese expression matte imasu commonly translates as "WILL be waiting" rather than (what he expects) "IS waiting". And what dictionary shares the student's eventual discovery that Japanese yori translates not only "than" but sometimes "other than" and sometimes "rather than"?

For the translating MACHINE, a dictionary must contain a great deal more

information about both languages than is currently available; the translating STUDENT can get by with a good deal less information, but--directly or indirectly--he too will have to have available much of the same sort of unusually detailed data. The area of greatest weakness in current dictionaries is that of the tough hard problems of syntax in each language, problems thrown into focus by the skewness found in drawing up rules of translation into another language. These are the problems with which we must come to grips in creating new dictionaries, whether we approach time in terms of a generative grammar or a distributional description.

While we are gathering the sort of information on which dictionaries of the future will thrive, there are certain kinds of small improvements we can make on dictionaries that are in being or in prospect. It is in this area that I would like to bring up for discussion a number of thoughts that have occurred to me in working on the problem of translation dictionaries for students.

1. We want to put in WHAT the student is like to look for WHERE he is likely to look for it. Our dictionaries of Japanese or Korean, for example, should be expanded to include the shorter inflected forms of common verbs, especially where these involve convergence of different stems and/or homonymy with uninflected forms:

Korean kanun, ignored by dictionaries, can be "...that is going" the processive modifier from ka-,"...that (someone) is grinding" the processive modifier from kal-, or "...that is slender" the plain modifier from kanul-. In normal Korean orthography the same sequence can also represent ka nun (any of several nouns ka + the topic particle); and in speech (or misspelling) it can additionally represent kan un (any of several nouns kan + the topic particle).

Japanese itte can be the gerund of iku "goes", of iu /yuu/ "says", or of

iru "be needed" or "enter (etc.)".

Japanese dictionaries will tell you that sita means "under" or "tongue"—they neglect to tell you that it also means "did" (past of suru). They will tell you that kita means "north", but forget to mention that it also means "came" (past of kuru) and "put on (clothing for the torso)" (past of kiru).

In a somewhat hit-or-miss fashion, our selection of dictionary entries is based on frequency, whether sampled or intuited. Beyond a certain point, each new noun we add has a decreasing usefulness. On the other hand, the inflected forms of common stems, the particles and particle sequences--these words not only have a high frequency but are a recurrent stumbling block to the student. Such forms must be included in our dictionary; we cannot expect the foreign student to have the native speaker's mastery of the grammar.

2. Some bad pennies of everyday conversation are shunned by dictionaries and grammars alike, despite their frequency: connective phrases (The thing is...), non-fluencies (uh...), greetings (Hi there!), interjections (uh-huh, and surprisingly oh-oh despite the fact that oho!, beloved of poets, often makes the grade). When you start working in this area, you find some delightful things about your own language: How do you call a dog? My informants use a bilabial click—which I spell psk!—often followed by here boy! How do you spell the gasp of sudden fright commonly heard in America (but not in Japan) ? My most helpful informant suggested "Novelists use the device Oh my goodness!" but admitted its inadequacy.

3. We want to boil our material down to essentials. In the interest of conciseness, we should aim at a single translational equivalent whenever possible. If several equivalents are presented, some indication should be given of the context (or kind of context) that would provoke the less expected versions. Our choice of THE equivalent (or the first equivalent) will be determined primarily by the decision which one is most broadly applicable; it should be the particular equivalent that the student is most likely to need.

There are, apparently, two purposes behind the common technique of piling up a group of synonyms in the target language: (1) to suggest to the translator a range of choices, (2) to give a clearer picture of the semantic spectrum of the entry item. But unless you give explicit directions for chosing among the synonyms, the list will be confusing to machine and student alike. And sometimes the uncritical heaping up of near-synonyms is simply an evasion of responsibility on the part of the dictionary maker: unable (or too little informed) to make up his own mind, he shifts the burden of choice to the user of the dictionary. When different translations are provided in order to show clear divergences in meaning, cross references to the appropriate synonyms in the source language are helpful both to the native speaker and to the foreign learner.

4. One indication of context that proves of value for the preceding purpose (showing divergences of meaning), as well as for other less obvious purposes, is to state the specific objects or kinds of objects that a particular transitive verb can take as its goal. This can be done unobtrusively by citing typical objects in parenthesis (in either the source language or the target language) before or after the appropriate translation. It is also desirable to indicate the specific words (or kinds of words) that a modifying word--adjective, adverb, etc.--can modify. This is especially important for intensifiers: the many translations of "very" in another language can be tricky indeed.

5. Examples of usage are helpful but only when they are CRITICAL. A single short example made up by a well-trained native speaker to illustrate a specific point is usually far superior to the motley collection of lengthy sentences culled in rote fashion by underpaid "researchers" out of novels and magazines. The purpose of an example is to show you something you would not have realized (or been sure about) from reading the suggested equivalent.

Often the example serves to provide grammatical information in a less explicit (and perhps more palatable) form than that demanded by, say, a translation machine.

6. Whenever possible, grammatical categories should be equated between the two languages, and each category (or translational device) should be used consistently. In other words, there ought to be an accepted (and expected) translation of major form classes. The reader has a right to expect, for example, that if Japanese verbs are usually translated as English verbs, an adjective will not turn up without some compelling reason. If kurai, a Japanese adjective, is translated as is dark, it will be misleading to translate kumoru, a Japanese verb, as is cloudy; the appropriate translation is gets (or becomes) cloudy.

7. One of the traditions of Western lexicography is to use the so-called "infinitive" form for both the entry heading and the translation of verbs. In English this produces ungainly phrases of to + the unmarked form of the verb. In many parts of the world, verbs are usually entered under the plain present (or non-past) form, and it is misleading to translate such headings with English to + constructions. Japanese suru does not mean to do; it means (someone) does or will do. The one advantage of the to + translation is that it clearly marks the word as a verb, and in English many verb forms are homonymous with nouns; simply dropping the to (as many dictionaries and word lists do) often adds to the student's immediate confusion when he locates an equivalent. By using the third person singular (the marked form of the present) we do not avoid noun homonymy entirely: forms could be the plural of a form. But if you expect the translation of nouns and verbs alike to be singular whenever possible, there is seldom much danger of confusion. And there is an advantage to a translation like does rather than to do: the verb is all ready to go into a sentence and do much the same work that the Japanese verb does.

This is why we like to translate the adjective of Japanese and Korean, and those of Chinese, not by the bare English adjective (good, tall, red) but by is + the adjective (is good, is tall, is red).

8. The little word it is very handy in English equivalents. When the source language has two verbs, transitive and intransitive, that correspond to a single English form, we can show the difference most effectively (both for ready intake and for permanent memory) by something like this:

aku it opens

akeru opens it

We need not mark ALL transitive and intransitive verbs in this way, only those pairs that cause confusion in the translation.

By translating the so-called copula of languages like Japanese (da/desu etc.), Korean (ita), and Chinese (shyh) as it is rather than just is, we prepare the student for sentences like Watasi wa Maru-biru desu which does not translate "I am the Marunouchi Building"! (The closest equivalent is "As for me, it is the M.B." Note that Are wa Maru-biru desu "As for it/him/her, it is the M.B." in the "it" sense can mean either "It is the M.B." or "It is in the M.B.")

9. To show translational syntax complications in an unobtrusive fashion, we can either use real, (but succinct), examples or resort to a form of light-weight algebra (A shows X to B) rather than clutter up space with clumsy frames like somebody shows something to somebody else or the eyesore sbd. shows sthg. to sbd.

10. Required prepositions (or post positions) should be clearly marked. If the foreign verb corresponds to English verb + preposition, the English phrase should be given as a unit:

sagasu looks for

But we will want some way to distinguish English verb transitive +

adverb from verb - preposition (- prepositional object), e.g.:

ireru puts (in), inserts

haku puts (footwear, trousers) on

11. Whenever possible, it should be clear from the translation what the subjects and objects of the entry verb might be. If the e is a problem of literal versus free translation, I favor giving the literal translation first, so that the student gets the proper syntactic orientation immediately:

iru is needed: A ni/wa X ga ... A needs X.

12. It is useful to include notes on "zero" elements in the translation situation—those (1) required, (2) preferred, (3) optional.

(E-J)	the	usually untranslated; sometimes = that
	a	usually untranslated; sometimes = one
(J-E)	san	Mr ... (= si), Miss ... (= san no ozyoosan; = zyosi), Mrs ... (= san no okusan); the person from (AFTER PLACENAME); BETTER NOT TRANSLATED (AFTER GIVEN NAME OR JOB NAME).

Sometimes it is convenient to set up conventional translation devices; instead of marking some words Honorific and others Humble, you may want to make a practice of translating the Honorific nouns (your) esteemed ... and the Humble nouns (my) humble ..., thus preserving the full flavor of the original at the expense of an exaggerated English.

13. Should we include an article with each English noun? From the point of view of the English speaker, the article is useful only when it tells something about the foreign word (e.g. whether it is a count-noun or mass-noun when these are homophones in English). Some European dictionaries put in the definite article for all nouns indiscriminately, influenced by German and French dictionaries (where the article is a concise way of noting gender). It seems clumsy and even ludicrous to see every noun in an English version of a German picture dictionary marked "the boot, the stirrup, the harness, the bit" etc. with "the heavy foot" everywhere in evidence.

14. We ought to include information on the appropriate classifier for nouns in languages with classificatory genders. But in modern Chinese, Korean, and Japanese (in contrast with Vietnamese and Thai) it is possible to ignore the vast majority of the count-nouns, since specific classifiers are used for only a small minority of them. Then the dictionary user must be sure that he is to be alerted whenever a specific classifier is preferred, optional, or obligatory.